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ABSTRACT

A description is provided of the development of a university assessment and planning system for all levels of the university. The system is applied in a case study of a regional university. The designed system takes into account the constraints of the state budgeting system, the planning procedures of the state-wide university system, and the management philosophy of the school's chancellor and administration. Individual unit plans; student placement data; student, faculty, and alumni surveys; the faculty evaluation system; and academic degree program reviews are used to provide assessment information for planning. The development of the assessment process is shown in a step-by-step approach. Progress stemming from the integration of university planning and assessment are discussed within the context of the activities generated. Contains 14 references. (GLR)

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THE INTEGRATION OF ASSESSMENT INTO THE PLANNING PROCESS: A CASE STUDY

by

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A Paper Prepared for the Thirtieth Annual Forum
of the Association for Institutional Research
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Jean Endo
Chair and Editor
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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the development of an assessment and a planning system at a regional university. The University examined the planning system, made revisions based on the philosophy of the Chancellor and his key administrators and on the external requirements of the state budget system, and then began the process of integrating assessment into the planning process. Individual unit plans; student placement data; student, faculty and alumni surveys; the faculty evaluation system; and academic degree program reviews are all designed to provide assessment information for planning.

INTRODUCTION AND PERSPECTIVE

Over the last few years, college and university planning and assessment have captured the attention of leaders in higher education.

Planning in higher education with regard to the physical plant has a long history. Turner (1988) described the facilities planning which occurred at Princeton and Harvard as early as 1760. That planning, which reflected particular concepts of higher education, can be seen in engravings of the buildings at the two universities during that period. On the other hand, planning primarily concerned with the management, operation and programmatic direction of the institution has only been in evidence for about the last twenty years. As Schmidtlein and Milton (1988) pointed out, "....higher education developed and tried a number of different planning approaches..." between 1960 and 1980. These included computer models such as RRPM (Resource Requirements Prediction Model) developed by the National Center for Higher Education Management and Systems (NCHEMS, 1973), and PlanTran, published by the Midwest Research Institute (1972)--both products of the early 1970's and the EDUCOM Financial Planning Model (1979) developed and published later in the decade. In addition to the computer models, there were "..various highly structured planning and management processes...(i.e. planning, programming, budgeting systems [PPBS], management by objectives [MBO], and zero-based budgeting [ZBB] in books, journals and workshops oriented toward

presidents and other senior administrators" (Schmidtlein and Milton, 1988). All of these were essentially rational models, not easily re-structured or adapted to the wide variety of institutions which comprise American higher education. The introduction of planning models loosely grouped under the term "strategic planning" represented a change of direction, from the highly structured planning models to more flexible planning systems. "Basically, strategic planning involves (1) scanning the external environment for possible threats and opportunities, (2) assessing internal strengths and weaknesses, (3) analyzing the external and internal information, and 4) identifying major directions that will promote institutional health and viability" (Schmidtlein and Milton, 1988). The key to the success of the planning processes loosely termed strategic planning is that they are flexible and designed to meet the needs of each institution.

Assessment as it is currently defined has an even shorter history. Between 1965 and 1975, the Educational Testing Service developed a series of instruments for assessing student, faculty, administrative and other constituent attitudes toward the University. These included the College Student Questionnaires which was first published in 1965, the Institutional Functioning Inventory (IFI) which was published in 1967, and the Institutional Goals Inventory (IGI) which was developed and tested some years later, in 1972. During the late 1970's and early 1980's, these and other means of assessment took a back seat to the interest in

planning, in large part because so many institutions were suffering financial difficulties brought on by declining enrollment.

State legislatures and regional accrediting agencies began to show an interest in assessment by the early 1980's. The current interest and emphasis on assessment was reinforced later in the decade with a series of reports, books and articles generally critical of higher education. Those publications which reached the general public range from the essentially negative approach of Bloom (1987), to the somewhat more positive but simplistic approach of Hirsch (1987). Boyer (1987, p. 8) in a much more thoughtful and balanced analysis concluded that while there are problems with higher education in the United States, there are also "...outstanding examples of good practice at institutions both large and small. Therefore, while educators have common concerns about the undergraduate experience, there ~~are~~ cannot be a single prescribed response. Strategies for excellence will vary from campus to campus and be shaped by the unique mission and traditions of the institution."

Recently, Ewell, Finney and Smith (1989) reported observing rapid movement toward state-based assessment. In 1987, their survey of state agencies for higher education indicated that about twelve states were engaged in serious assessment efforts. By 1989, twenty-seven states reported that they had assessment initiatives in place, with an additional six encouraging assessment in some way. In addition, the states were much more sophisticated in the description and interpretation of their assessment efforts.

The commitment to improve the quality of higher education in the United States has also been reflected through changes in the accrediting process. In the southern region of the country there have been substantial changes in the procedures and expectations of the regional accrediting agency. In 1984, the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools made a sharp break with tradition and formally adopted Criteria for Accreditation to replace the standards which had been in effect for many years. The difference between the standards and the new criteria was more than just cosmetic. It signalled a basic change in philosophy. The old standards stressed measurement of such aspects of the University as the number of library books, the percentage of faculty with doctorate degrees, the quality and number of laboratories, the number of classrooms and the number of faculty offices. These measures were assumed to be surrogates for educational quality. The new criteria, on the other hand, stress the continuous assessment of outcomes at all levels of university operations and, in particular, they stress assessment of student outcomes. The emphasis is on developing ongoing processes to improve planning, assessment, and ultimately, educational quality at the institution.

The remainder of this paper describes the development of a planning system and the integration of assessment into that system at a regional university.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE PLANNING SYSTEM

As preparation for the self-study process began, it became clear that the University must adopt one of two strategies. On one hand, the decision could be made to meet the outcomes and assessment requirements at a minimum level, concentrating on defense of the status quo. The second approach and the one that was adopted was to use the opportunity presented by the self-study process to upgrade and revise the planning system, to strengthen assessment activities and to integrate planning and assessment at all levels of the University.

The revision of the planning system focused on adjusting the system to conform to the constraints of the state budgeting process; to the planning procedures of the state-wide university system; to the management philosophy of the Chancellor and his administration; and to the existing organizational structure of the University.

The first step in the revision process was to address the outside constraints on planning, the most important being the state mandated planning horizon which is two years for most activities. As an example, the expansion budget which, aside from funds allocated for increases in enrollment, is the principle source of new or additional funds is prepared and presented to the state university system in August or early September of each even numbered year. In addition, the Long Range Plan Update is prepared and submitted to the same governing body in February or March of

each odd numbered year. Since the expansion budget request is the principle source of new money including money for capital improvements and the Long Range Plan Update is the principle vehicle for requesting permission to establish new academic degree programs, to establish new research and public service institutes and to develop new colleges or schools, a two year planning cycle which corresponded to these activities was needed. A shorter cycle would be redundant and a longer cycle would cause the University to miss opportunities to request new money or new programs.

The next consideration in developing a campus-level planning system was the organizational structure of the institution and the third was the management style of the chancellor. The previous planning system at North Carolina Central University assumed that the allocation of funds was a planning activity and assigned that responsibility to planning committees organized along budgetary lines. The chancellor and his administrative team consider budgeting to be an administrative responsibility. To conform to this philosophy, the system was redesigned so that committees were structured along administrative lines; one committee devoted to the activities of each of four vice chancellors. Table 1 contains a list of the vice chancellors with a corresponding list of the committees. While most activities fit clearly into the purview of a single administrative division, there were two areas of University activity which consistently crossed administrative lines. These were computing and facilities planning. To accommodate these two groups of activities two additional

committees were formed: one to address planning for computing and telecommunications; and the second to coordinate facilities planning. The overall or umbrella planning group is the University Planning Council which coordinates the activities of all six committees. The principle planning committees and their current chairpersons are given in Table I. The chairpersons of the last two committees change every two years. The titles in parentheses indicate the alternate chairperson.

Table 1
North Carolina Central University
Principle Planning Committees

Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs	Academic Planning Committee
Vice Chancellor for Development	Institutional Advancement Planning Committee
Vice Chancellor for Financial Affairs	Administrative Services Planning Committee
Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs	Student Services Planning Committee
Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs (Vice Chancellor for Financial Affairs)	Computer and Communications Planning Committee
Vice Chancellor for Development (Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs)	Facilities Planning Committee

THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The principle applied to the assessment of University goals and objectives and for the assessment of student outcomes was similar to that developed for the planning system; that is, that priority should be given to assessment activities that were ongoing activities of the institution or to activities that would be of use beyond the accreditation self-study period.

As recommended by Nichols (1989) the first step was to ascertain what assessment activities were already being conducted on a regular basis. This was accomplished by a survey of all academic departments in the College of Arts and Sciences and of all schools and a review of the data collection activities of the Office of Research, Evaluation and Planning. We found, as many Universities have, that a remarkable amount of assessment was occurring on the campus.

The second step was to determine what University-wide assessment activities would be useful and could be integrated into the ongoing research and evaluation activities. Table 2 documents the major activities. The activities printed in bold print are those that were added as a result of the self-study. More than half of the assessment projects were regular, ongoing activities of some unit of the University. The remainder, with the exception of the assessment of the General College Studies program are scheduled at four year intervals. The purpose of these longer interval assessments is to monitor trends and then to identify problems. More frequent administration did not seem to be

necessary. Again, the objective was to obtain the information needed for meaningful assessment without placing an undue burden on the University community.

Table 2
University-Wide Assessment Activities

Activity	Purpose	Frequency
GCS Evaluation	Assess effectiveness of the General College Studies Program.	Yearly
Alumni Survey	Determine alumni perceptions of the University and determine student success after graduation.	Every Fourth Cohort
Faculty Survey	Determine faculty perceptions of University and program quality governance.	Every Four Years
Freshman Survey	Determine freshmen attitudes and demographics. The data become a major part of many retention studies.	Every Other Year
Freshman Admission Testing	Place students in advanced math classes and determine need for remedial instruction in math, reading and English.	Yearly
Institutional Goals Inventory	Determine student, faculty and administration perceptions of the present goals of the University and what those goals should be.	Every Four Years
Non-Returning Student Survey	Determine reasons why students fail to enroll after their first year.	Yearly
Senior Survey	Determine student perceptions of the University programs and Administrative Units.	Every Four Years

Although the University-wide assessment procedures are extensive, they are only a small portion of the overall assessment effort. Every unit on campus has developed goals, objectives and assessment procedures following the format recommended in the Resource Manual on Institutional Effectiveness (1987) published by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. These goals and objectives are tied to the mission and goals of the University and to the goals and objectives of the University division[1] in which the unit is located.

The final segment of the assessment program is the assessment of University goals. Procedures for the assessment of each goal were developed by the Office of Research, Evaluation and Planning and approved by the Self-Study Steering Committee. These assessment procedures were then applied to an assessment of progress toward achieving the goals. The report was completed by the same office and approved by the newly appointed University Institutional Effectiveness Committee[2].

The Office of Research, Evaluation and Planning supplys reports on the University-wide assessment efforts to the University Planning Council, to the six planning committees, to the University

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[1] The divisions are the administrative areas of the four vice chancellors--Academic Affairs, Development, Financial Affairs, Student Affairs

[2] The University Institutional Effectiveness Committee is a standing committee appointed by the Chancellor in 1989 to monitor the goals, objectives and assessment procedures of the individual units on campus and to review any campus-wide surveys or other campus-wid assessment activities

Institutional Effectiveness Committee, and to individual academic and non-academic units as appropriate. The University fact book, FACTS, is completed yearly and made available for all vice chancellors, deans, academic department chairs and directors of non-academic units. This publication contains comparative data useful for planning and assessment.

With these documents, the report on the assessment of the University goals, and the goals, objectives and assessments of the individual units on campus, the University has the necessary parts of its assessment process.

INTEGRATION OF PLANNING AND ASSESSMENT

The task in the coming years will be integrate the various components of planning and assessment. Substantial progress has already been made as indicated by the following activities:

1. In August of 1989 the University Planning Council reviewed and revised the internal and external assumptions. Using the revised assumptions and the report on the assessment of University goals, the Council revised the University goals. This process will be repeated in the summer of 1991 and every two years thereafter.

2. During the summer of 1989, work was completed on revision of the faculty evaluation system. A key provision of the revised system is that each faculty member, in consultation with the department chairperson or dean, is required to develop a personal work plan that includes goals and objectives for the following year. While each plan is developed to conform to the interests, abilities and responsibilities of the individual faculty member, it is understood that the plan must also be consistent with the goals and objectives of the school or department.

3. The Institutional Effectiveness committee, in the process of reviewing the goals, objectives and assessments for the previous year, found that the format for recording them needed revision to emphasize assessment and use of assessment results. The revised format was then sent to the Vice Chancellors so that it would become part of the instructions for preparing annual reports for 1989-90.

4. Academic program reviews, to be conducted on a rotating basis, were instituted in the fall of 1989. A major part of the review of each program is assessment of progress toward achieving the goals and objectives of the program. These program reviews will be completed for

five or six of the 22 degree granting units each academic year. It is anticipated that each unit will undergo a program review every five years.

5. In the spring of 1990, the University Planning Council prepared instructions for the six planning committees regarding initial preparations for the development of the expansion budget. Committees are to submit prioritized requests to the Council by June of 1990. The expansion budgets will be completed in August of 1990. Some revisions may be necessary in individual requests depending on instructions from The University of North Carolina General Administration.

6. In February of 1990, the University Planning Council approved a format for the preparation of individual unit and divisional annual reports that required each area to include a section on the assessment of the individual unit goals and objectives. This format will be used annually.

7. In the fall of 1990, the academic units will prepare requests for new programs and centers to be included in the Long Range Plan Update which will be submitted to General Administration in early spring of 1991. These requests are expected reflect the goals and objectives

of the academic unit. In addition, academic units have been advised to request funds for new activities they plan to request in the Long Range Plan Update in their expansion budget requests.

The University expects to institute an administrator evaluation system during the 1990-91 academic year. The core of the evaluation for each administrator will be the assessment of progress toward meeting the goals and objectives of the unit for which the administrator is responsible as well as progress toward meeting the individual goals and objectives established at the same time.

In summary, the University is making a major effort to develop and implement a planning system that will ensure ongoing assessment of University activities at all levels and integrate all assessment and planning efforts into the ongoing administration of the campus. The core of the assessment program is the evaluation of progress toward achieving goals and objectives. Departments, Schools, non-academic administrative units all develop goals and objectives. Progress toward the objectives is assessed annually and reported to the appropriate vice chancellor as part of the annual report. The annual reports have been required annually for many years. The new element is the inclusion of a report on the unit goals and objectives. Goals and objectives are incorporated directly into the planning effort in that all budget requests and requests for

new programs and activities must be linked to the goals and objectives of the school, department or other administrative unit.

Similarly, faculty are evaluated annually. The faculty evaluation system was revised to emphasize the development of personal goals and objectives for each faculty member. The revised system is, in fact, more flexible, less cumbersome than the one it replaces, yet it emphasizes planning and assessment in a way that the previous system did not. The anticipated evaluation system for University administrators will include evaluation of goals and objectives as a major element. University-wide assessment efforts such as faculty, student and alumni surveys and the evaluation of the General College Studies program are intended to provide information to be used in assessment of University goals as well as assessment of the goals and objectives of individual units. They are not viewed as "stand-alone" assessments. These and other assessment activities are intended to provide a framework for the continual evaluation of University programs and outcomes. The results of this continual evaluation process are an integral part of the planning process. By tying both planning and assessment to the goals and objectives, the two processes are linked.

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